HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 106 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Chair

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.)): Good morning everyone. Welcome to meeting number 106 of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, on Tuesday, June 5. Today we are going to be reviewing the main estimates, 2018-19, votes 1, 5, and 10 under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I would like to welcome today a number of people who are no strangers to this committee. We have Catherine Blewett, Deputy Minister; Kevin Stringer, Associate Deputy Minister; Jen O'Donoughue, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer; Jeffery Hutchinson, Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard; Sylvie Lapointe, Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management; Philippe Morel, Assistant Deputy Minister, Aquatic Ecosystems Sector; Mario Pelletier, Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Canadian Coast Guard.

Thank you all for attending.

I understand that this morning instead of having two 10-minute opening remarks, we'd like one session of 20 minutes. Instead of doing a number of back and forth, we'll go with one.

I believe we also would like to welcome to the committee today Mr. Deltell from Louis-Saint-Laurent and Mr. Poilievre from Carleton.

Thank you so much for joining us today.

We will get started with you, Ms. Blewett, for your opening remarks. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Catherine Blewett (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Good morning, Madam Chair.

It's a real pleasure to be here with you to discuss the main estimates for 2018-19, which were tabled in mid-April.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, you have introduced our party, so I will skip that and save a little bit of time for the committee.

To begin with, I want to thank you for this opportunity to share the significant results we have achieved for Canadians. Through the main estimates for 2018-19, the department's total budget for this fiscal year amounts to $2.5 billion. This represents a net increase of $244.7 million over last year. This increase is due mainly to new funding for the oceans protection plan, for maintaining mission-critical services to Canadians, for the Atlantic fisheries fund, and for ongoing renewal and expansion of indigenous fisheries programs and initiatives.

[*Translation*]

I want to take this opportunity to provide some examples of how the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, and the Coast Guard are using this funding to meet the needs and expectations of Canadians.

[*English*]

We're already seeing far-reaching benefits in coastal and indigenous communities on all three coasts from our oceans protection plan. For example, initial training has been completed for the crew of a new inshore rescue boat station in Rankin Inlet. Starting this summer, crew members will be able to provide assistance to mariners in local waters who are in distress or in need of help, and will also be able to share valuable information on boating safety when needed.

The Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre St. John's has been officially reopened. This sub-centre is being staffed around the clock by highly trained maritime search and rescue coordinators who coordinate the on-the-water responses to maritime rescue incidents in the unique, challenging, and often dangerous waters off Newfoundland and Labrador.

The oceans protection plan is also funding a unique training program on Vancouver Island that pairs traditional indigenous knowledge with the Coast Guard's search and rescue expertise. To date, 27 members of 20 first nations communities in B.C. have graduated from three coastal nations search and rescue courses that are helping to build on the role they already play in maritime safety in their communities.

The oceans protection plan's $75-million coastal restoration fund is also being implemented on all three coasts with the help of our many partners. Last year, Fisheries and Oceans received $167 million that was used to shore up a number of key program areas. They included Coast Guard assets and core activities; our science and fisheries management, including conservation and protection; as well as the physical infrastructure and information technology needed to carry out our mandate.

I'd like to give you a few very quick examples. Funding to operate and refurbish aging ships is helping us to ensure that the government will be able to provide reliable, essential marine services until new vessels from the national shipbuilding program are put into service. Commissioner Hutchinson and Mr. Pelletier will be able to provide to the committee any details on the Coast Guard's work.

As you know, budget 2018 provides $250 million over two years for improvements at small craft harbours across Canada. This is in line with the government's commitment to support harbours and local economies, and foster job creation. Members of this committee had expressed a desire to learn which of the projects will be going forward, including when engineering and construction work is to begin. I expect that the minister will very soon be in a position to share this information with you.

We're also working to ensure the sustainable use of the oceans' resources and improve how fisheries are managed on the high seas through monitoring, control, and surveillance, to curb incidents of illegal fishing and to improve international fisheries and oceans governance over the long term. Curbing IUU fishing is a priority for Canada. Actually, today Canada is joining the United Nations General Assembly and the global community in observing an official day, June 5, to promote awareness of the need to combat IUU fishing. Protecting species on the high seas and in our domestic waters is a priority.

[*Translation*]

As the North Atlantic right whale population returns, the government has put in place a number of measures to try and prevent any further deaths from occurring this summer.

[*English*]

I'll just let the committee know that late yesterday we received word that there are, in fact, 75 of the North Atlantic right whales in the gulf waters as of yesterday, so the population really is moving. It's quite a change.

Minister LeBlanc already announced several changes to the 2018 snow crab fishery in the southern Gulf of the St. Lawrence that will help protect right whales from getting tangled in fishing gear.

Important work is also happening on the west coast with respect to the recovery and the protection of the southern resident killer whales. We've actively been working to protect this endangered species by recently implementing closures to the chinook fishery in areas where those whales feed and forage, and by introducing new rules that prohibit vessels from approaching closer than 200 metres, which will help minimize noise disturbance and allow the whales to feed more easily. We also are continuing to work with our partners on issues related to critical habitat.

In addition to protecting mariners and the marine environment, federal funding for DFO is essential for achieving reconciliation with indigenous peoples, fostering trade, developing clean technologies, investing in coastal communities, and improving economic opportunities.

● (0855)

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will now turn it over to Ms. O'Donoughue, before taking questions.

[*English*]

Ms. Jen O'Donoughue (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you. Good morning, Madam Chair and committee members.

[*Translation*]

As the deputy minister mentioned, my name is Jen O'Donoughue, and I am the Chief Financial Officer for DFO and the Canadian Coast Guard.

We are pleased to be here this morning to provide a brief overview of the main estimates for 2018-19.

[*English*]

The presentation will be brief. This will allow plenty of time to go through any questions the committee may have. I will invite you to follow along using the PowerPoint presentation, which I believe all of you have a copy of.

As outlined on slide 3 of the presentation, the timing of the estimates has changed in 2018-19. Minister Brison tabled interim estimates back in February to ensure departments were able to start the fiscal year. The key change is the timing of main estimates, which now follows the budget.

As with all supply bills, they are referred to committee, where the contents are studied before voting actually takes place, which is why we are here today. The government tabled main estimates after the budget to better reflect budget priorities. This provides greater clarity and transparency to Canadians, and makes it easier for you, as parliamentarians, to scrutinize the estimates as part of your oversight of government spending.

I would also quickly like to note that our resources are no longer presented using the program alignment architecture. We now present, for information purposes only, our resources using our new departmental results framework. In the main estimates, specifically on page II–94 of the English main estimates, or page II-197 of the French, our resources are broken down by core responsibility: marine operations and response, fisheries, marine navigation, and aquatic ecosystems.

[*Translation*]

The numbers are presented in a similar fashion in the table on page II-93, but we broke the information down further to give you more detail.

[*English*]

This is on page II-93 of the English version.

The main estimates for 2018-19 total $2.45 billion, which represents a net increase of $244.7 million over last year.

I will now outline some of the key adjustments. These items can also be found on page II-94 in the highlights section. Our largest increase is related to the oceans protection plan, at $275 million. In her opening remarks, the deputy provided some examples of what the OPP is allowing us to do.

The next increase, at $244.7 million, is funding stemming from the comprehensive review of our programs and services to ensure we are able to maintain mission-critical services to Canadians. There is also an increase of $58.6 million in the Atlantic fisheries fund, which is now included in main estimates. This seven-year initiative, which started in 2017-18, supports the fish and seafood sector in Atlantic Canada as it transitions through significant challenges facing the region.

The final increase I will highlight today is an additional $42.2 million for the ongoing renewal and expansion of our indigenous fisheries programs and initiatives, which support the commitment to promoting the economic resilience of indigenous communities.

There are two additional planned adjustments. They represent planned decreases to funding profiles as the initiatives are nearing successful completion and the funding is winding down. This funding was temporary in nature. The first is a funding profile change to our federal infrastructure investments. The majority of these initiatives have been successfully completed. The second relates to funding for the offshore fisheries science vessels as the vessels are approaching the completion stage.

On the last slide, we have outlined DFO's budget 2018 measures. This information is similar to the budget 2018 annex included in these main estimates, specifically page A1-4, or A1-6 in the French version. This is a key pillar to Minister Brison's estimates reform.

Please note that before DFO can access any of these amounts, all initiatives will require approval of Treasury Board ministers. The budget implementation vote sets clear parameters for the allocation of funds. We cannot seek additional funding nor can we reallocate towards other initiatives or other purposes. Treasury Board Secretariat will report the allocations by department and by measure to Parliament on a monthly basis.

● (0900)

[*Translation*]

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our main estimates with you.

My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hardie, go ahead.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Chair, before our questions begin, I'd like to take a moment to officially move a notice of motion that was made last month. The motion reads as follows:

> That the Committee undertake a study to examine the regulation of the West Coast fisheries, specifically in relation to fishing licences, quotas, and owner operator and fleet separation policies, in order to evaluate the impact of the current regime on fisheries management outcomes, the distribution of economic benefits generated by the industry and the aspirations of fishers and their communities, and to provide the government with options and recommendations to improve those outcomes, and that the Chair shall be empowered to coordinate the necessary witnesses, resources and scheduling to complete this task.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie, thank you.

Mr. Finnigan.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Chair, I would like to propose a short amendment to the motion.

We could add to the end, "starting no later than February 2019."

The Chair: There was a notice of motion for this last month. Any discussion on the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to our round of questioning. I believe we have Mr. Rogers for the first seven minutes.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I say welcome to our honourable officials, and thank you for being with us today.

I'm going to focus my questions on a couple of topics. First, small craft harbours are very important to my riding of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, with over 100 harbours on the coastlines of my riding. Fishers and recreational boaters rely on them, both for their livelihoods and the enjoyment they get from recreational boating. On this note, I was pleased to see such significant investment of $250 million into maintaining our small craft harbours. It is clear that the government cares about investing in the coastal communities that we live in.

Could you please tell us if the department has finalized its investment plans for 2018-19, as it relates to small craft harbours? When will we know the plan for allocating this money?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for the question.

The allocation through the last budget was a tremendous investment, and the work is going on. I will turn to Sylvie Lapointe, our assistant deputy minister, who has that detail. I would say very soon. A lot of the initial work in potential project identification and looking at some of the requirements is under way to get to the final list. As well, the regular programming has already been moved under way.

I'll turn to Sylvie.

● (0905)

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you. Good morning everyone.

We did receive some substantial investments into the program. It's B-base funding of $250 million over a two-year period. We are currently moving the list of projects through approvals. The money we received is for maintenance, repairs, and dredging operations for our core fishing harbours. There's also a significant amount that will be going to divestiture of non-core fishing harbours, to reduce the department's risk in this regard.

As our deputy mentioned, the A-base funding that we have is about $100 million every year. Those projects are under way for this year. We're confident we'll be able to deliver on the program. We have a strong track record of doing that. Over the last three years, in addition to our A-base funding of $100 million, we've been able to spend over $400 million in additional funds. As soon as we have the list finalized, we'll be sharing it with the committee.

Mr. Churence Rogers: How many small craft harbours are expected to benefit from the additional funding over the next two years? How is the allocation of funds decided upon for each individual small craft harbour?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: I don't yet have the breakdown of how many harbours will receive funding. The projects are selected, with respect to overall maintenance and repairs, based on consultations with our harbour authorities, as well as studies that are done on the ground by our engineers to determine the condition of the small craft harbour. The harbours that are placed on a priority basis will be the ones that are in a state of disrepair, that are at risk, where there are a lot of commercial harvesters accessing those harbours, and there are significant socio-economic impacts to the communities.

With respect to the ones that will be divested, it's very much dependent on the state of readiness, with respect to negotiations with municipalities, governments, and the third parties that are prepared to take on the small craft harbour.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you.

With regard to the oceans protection plan, we have a historic investment in protecting our oceans, which is the lifeblood of many of our communities, of course. I was proud that this plan provided for the reopening of the Coast Guard substation, which you referenced in your opening comments, and allowed for the building of two new lifeboat stations, one that is located in my riding in Old Perlican.

Could you please inform us how the funds for the oceans protection plan have been rolling out, and the progress we've made on the various pillars of the plan?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for the question.

This year, the rollout of the oceans protection plan is going to be a huge focus for the department. I also referenced in my opening remarks some of the contribution funding that will go to many of our third parties through restoration projects. Those are going to happen across the country, and they're going to be a tremendous advantage as we work to restore critical habitat across the country.

The commissioner of the Coast Guard, and actually assistant commissioner Mario Pelletier, can talk to you about some of the investments in the Coast Guard. These investments are in a couple of areas. They're in the people, building up the capacity that we'd frankly lost in terms of the men and women who serve Canadians in the Coast Guard. Also, they're in the physical assets that have been coming, the purchasing of vessels and situating search and rescue onshore. It's also working through a lot of the basic infrastructure: the radar, the ability to detect vessels and follow through.

Mario, do you have other comments?

● (0910)

Mr. Mario Pelletier (Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Again, it's a lot about people, but a lot about equipment as well. The number of ships, radar sites, and emergency response equipment are key to our ability to respond on the water. We are renewing our entire suite of emergency response equipment and purchasing a mobile command post as well, so that we are ready to deploy people in the field, ready to take action, and do proper management. We're also—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pelletier. Those are your seven minutes. Maybe somebody else can finish that line of questioning if you'd like.

We're now going to Mr. Doherty, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Ms. Blewett, how many Federal Court cases challenging the minister's decisions are you fighting right now?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Are you talking about the Arctic surf clam?

Mr. Todd Doherty: How many Federal Court cases challenging the minister's decisions are you fighting right now?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Unfortunately I don't have a particular number. We'll get back to you if there's information.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, you gave the minister seven options regarding the Arctic surf clam proposal.

Did you advise him that Five Nations was the best?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you for the question.

Our job was to review all of the applications. We actually received nine. The department deemed that two were ineligible, so there were the remaining seven. We assessed those seven against criteria, direct benefits—

Mr. Todd Doherty: I'm sorry to cut you off, but my time is short.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Sure.

Mr. Todd Doherty: You gave the minister seven options. Did you advise him that Five Nations was the best?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Our job was to present the minister...do the memorandum, with options for his selection.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Does the minister often direct the department to help a proponent complete essential bid criteria?

For example, he asked you to help Five Nations find their indigenous partners. Is this how the minister normally works?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: With respect to a decision docket that comes through, very often any docket can receive additional instructions. Dockets are the advice from departments to ministers, and it's typical that there can be incremental instructions.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

When you presented him with Five Nations as an option, were you aware of any family connections?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I was not aware of any family connections.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, the minister is subject to a screen on issues involving J.D. Irving, Limited, and I noticed in the Federal Court documents disclosure that the decision contained no reference to the matters covered by the screen relating to J.D. Irving, Limited.

We know the minister's wife's cousin was set to run Five Nations Clam Company. We also know that the Liberal MP Darrell Samson's brother is the owner of Premium Seafoods, the Five Nations' partner.

Does the department do an ethical screen for all decisions made to determine if there might be a conflict of interest, outside of the Irving screen, and were you, or anyone else in the department, aware of the family connections or the close ties to former and currently sitting Liberal MPs?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: In terms of a personal connection, I was not aware, and I would say that our department was not aware.

Sorry, can I ask you to go back? I don't want to miss any elements of that.

Mr. Todd Doherty: My other question was, does the department do an ethics screen for all decisions made, to determine whether there might be a conflict of interest outside the Irving screen?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We focus on the ethical screen that a minister would have set up through the Ethics Commissioner, and it is related to the J.D. Irving screen. We do not look at considerations over and above those formal screens put in place.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, the minister has claimed that the purpose of the new Arctic surf clam licence was to involve and reconcile with indigenous peoples. Is that correct?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Todd Doherty: By this, then, it would make sense for the minister to pick a proposal that mostly involves indigenous peoples, correct?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Correct. That's the intent.

Mr. Todd Doherty: There were various proposals with 100% indigenous ownership, yet as it stands, Five Nations has only 25% indigenous ownership. In fact, Five Nations has the least amount of indigenous ownership. This doesn't seem to be in line with the minister's claimed purpose of indigenous reconciliation, especially when we learn that Five Nations has various ex-Liberal members and family members in charge.

How do you explain this decision?

● (0915)

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Mr. Doherty, as you would know, in regard to the job of the department, we went through all the proposals that we got through an expression of interest, and the intent certainly was, as you point out, to ensure that the benefits of a fishery would go to indigenous Canadians. We provided the advice to the minister.

Just to give some context, this is probably the first time that government made the effort to specifically allocate a quota such as this through to indigenous Canadians, so—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, I'm going to stop you right there, because I have a document with me here. It's a news release dated July 17, 2015. It is talking about the expansion of the total allowable catch of the Arctic surf clam, to increase from 38,756 tonnes to 52,655 tonnes, and specifically talking about the 2016 fisheries management. It also talks about the consultation with the current licence-holder, industry, and first nations. Therefore, I don't believe that is an accurate or fair comment that you've made.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Let me perhaps put a finer point on it. It was to explicitly include indigenous Canadians as the primary beneficiary. I didn't mean to slight a previous process. We do our best all the time to make sure that we consult, to the extent we can, with the indigenous partners, governments, first nations, and stakeholders. We do our best.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, are you currently aware that Five Nations Clam Company is having trouble securing financing?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: That's actually not the understanding that the department has, and the corporation has made it clear to the department that they wish to proceed.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our departmental officials for joining us today.

In November 2016, the government announced $1.5 billion over five years for the oceans protection plan. That's about $300 million a year. How much of that $1.5 billion has been spent to date?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Mr. Donnelly, I may turn to our CFO to give you a bit of a breakdown.

Ms. Jen O'Donoughue: Do you mean the breakdown of the spending to date?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I don't want a breakdown. I just want to know the overall number.

Ms. Jen O'Donoughue: Based on the information we have, approximately $150 million has been spent to date.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: How much of that has been spent on oil spill response, specifically?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'll ask Mario.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: The OPP is to ramp up our capacity. The oil spill response is part of our A-base numbers. I can get back to you with the exact amount of money we spend on oil spill response.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Do you have an approximation?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: We'll get back to you with the exact amount of money we spent on oil spill response for last year.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, thank you.

How much has been spent on the Pacific coast?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: We'll get that to you as well.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I guess it's going to be hard for you to answer this next question.

What exactly has the money for oil spill response on the Pacific coast been spent on? Is it equipment or research, and what type?

● (0920)

Mr. Mario Pelletier: For the response, per se, we'll give you the answer. For the oceans protection plan, for the buying of new equipment and supporting the oceans protection plan for the Coast Guard, it's about $60 million. That includes buying new equipment, and the work to upgrade our operational networks, and to make the marine communication traffic services system more reliable and not reliant on third parties. Some of it, as well, went to the emergency towing vessel that we are in the bid evaluation process for. We should announce the contract award likely later this month and the start of operations would be in the fall.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

Through the OPP's enhanced preparedness and response capability, the department will undertake science research to evaluate how various oil products behave when spilled in different environmental conditions to help inform risk assessments and decision-making.

How has the department advanced preparedness and response capability?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I might touch on a first part of it. One of the things that has been interesting, through the science part of the department is that we really have been looking at the fate and behaviour of oil in water. Actually, our science folks let us know yesterday that Canada is participating, and DFO specifically, in some international science trials with Norway looking at exactly how oil behaves in water and we're trying to then make sure we apply that though our oceans protection plan.

Mario may have the details on the update, but I just wanted to give you that science update because it is something that's recurring.

The other thing, as we look across—

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Sorry, could I jump in and ask about, specifically, diluted bitumen. Do we know if that sinks or floats in ocean conditions?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: In the responses that we've seen through science—and we'd actually be very happy to provide you with that work—we're not seeing, as I recall, characteristics of that substance very different from other substances. Some of the science work is ongoing and, as I say, Canada is leading through DFO with our scientists. We're really focused on that as part of our OPP science investment.

Mario, do you have anything to add there?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: The work is ongoing. What we notice is that the behaviour doesn't tend to deviate from the product we already know. As a matter of fact, depending on, again, the temperature and the type of water, sea water or fresh water, it will vary a little bit, but it will float on the water initially to give time to the response organizations to do a proper response.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: How long will it float for? Can you forward the committee the study that tells us this?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: For the research to date, we'll see what we can provide, yes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: How long does it float for?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: We're talking about days and weeks, not hours. I wouldn't want to put an exact number of days, but it's days and weeks.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You're saying that if a large spill happens, let's say, dilbit—diluted bitumen—would float for weeks.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Depending on the conditions: the sea state, the water temperature.... Some of the research that was done was on calm water, but we'll get you some more details.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, thanks.

On the fisheries and aquaculture programs, budget 2018 announced $11 million over two years. How is this investment reflected in the main estimates?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for the question.

Philippe?

Mr. Philippe Morel (Assistant Deputy Minister, Aquatic Ecosystems Sector, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We already have the process and approval to spend the money. It's in the DFO budget. I don't know exactly which page it is, but it's the renewal of the sustainable aquaculture program that was done for two years to allow us the time to respond to the CESD report and to make sure that, when we renew the program for a longer term, we will have the proper adjustment to modernize it.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morel.

Mr. Hardie, now, you have the final seven minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, everybody, for being here.

There's quite a bit of additional funding, and I want to get a sense from you as to how this funding is being applied vis-à-vis the longer 10- to 15-year history of funding envelopes for the ministry. It's been well canvassed that you faced cutbacks from, say, 2006 through 2015. Now funding has been increased, first for science and now for other things. Are you going back and restoring things that were cut, or are you leaving some things off the table now and moving forward into new areas?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for that question. I really appreciate that.

The investment has really been substantial for the department over the last two budgets, and it's making a big impact in our department. I might just talk about some of what we call—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Be brief, if you can, because I have other questions.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: —the integrity funding. We're starting to be able to reinvest in some of the infrastructure, the actual labs. There's the human resource side: hiring the new scientists. We brought on 135 new scientists. Also we're actually being able to shore up the real property—the wharfs, the labs—and making those really sound. They're kind of boring investments. For our department, actually, IT is pretty critical when you have scientists who actually can't download the data because they don't have the IT space, or when we're making sure that we have connections from coast to coast to coast. That backbone infrastructure investment has really made a big difference.

To your question about what we're doing with it, I want to stress that we're not just moving the money back to what was always done. Actually, this is our opportunity, and as a management team we're focusing on the mandate commitments that our department is driven by and the results framework and the architecture that we have. We're trying to allocate the resources to the highest and best use for outcomes for the department, so it's an opportunity for us to actually make sure we're thinking it through and maximizing the investments.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Good. I'll stop you there, because I want to get specific with respect to the small craft harbour funding. When was the last time that the basic funding envelope was increased for small craft harbours?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: As Sylvie mentioned, it's been B-base funding. I'll turn to Sylvie for the specifics on that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have one more question after that, so again a short answer would be appreciated. Thank you.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: My recollection is that it's probably not been since the early 2000s or late 1990s that our A-base budget would have expanded.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay. Good. Thank you for that.

Turning to aquaculture, we had an incident in Washington state over a year ago now, I think, where there was a huge escape, and based on that, Washington state is moving away from ocean-based aquaculture. What is the department's reading of the state of aquaculture on the west coast?

I understand that the conditions on the east coast are different, and the approach is different, but on the west coast, what are you seeing, what are you hearing, and where are you going?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Actually, I should say that aquaculture on the west coast does warrant a lot of our attention. Late last night I spoke with the deputy minister from British Columbia because we're trying to work collaboratively with the provinces as they work their way through aquaculture.

On the west coast, indigenous engagement is really important. You referenced the escape in Washington state. It certainly has raised the profile and a lot of questions.

Canada's chief science adviser is Dr. Mona Nemer. Through the minister's office, we've engaged her to have a look at how we're doing in our decisions on aquaculture. Are we adequately considering science? Is science the backbone for the decisions? That's really going to be strongly guiding us. The science is changing all the time, and we expect that science is going to continue to come out.

Where are we going? We want to work, again, as I mentioned, with British Columbia to find what's acceptable in that jurisdiction. We have a different management regime, as you will know. For example, there is a lot of discussion about aquaculture in the Broughton area. The province is responsible for the tenure—that's where they're located—and then DFO does the licensing. We work co-operatively to make sure that we are achieving the best outcomes. We also do some joint science together.

● (0930)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Per the motion that we tabled this morning, we've seen research that shows that the fishery on the west coast is underperforming. Alaska is doing well. The east coast is doing well. Even with lower catches, average incomes are going up. The prices at the wharf are in good shape. But that's not so much the case in British Columbia.

A lot of fingers point to the ITQ system, where all of a sudden you're getting a huge concentration of ownership. The separation that you see as being very core to the belief on the east coast isn't there on the west coast. It appears that many communities are suffering.

If we want to take another look at this, is this like trying to unscramble an egg, or is there a way forward?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much.

I'm going to turn to Kevin Stringer, who is smiling at your question.

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): There are hugely different histories on the west coast and the east coast in terms of how the fishery developed. The core policies around owner-operator—you have to be on the boat—and fleet separation, where a processing company can't own a fish licence, were established back in the seventies and eighties, and the fishery has been developed since that time.

That said, are there things that you can do with respect to the inshore fleet and the independent fleet on the west coast? Certainly, that can be done. We note, with interest, that the committee is going to take a look at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stringer.

We'll go now to our five-minute round.

Mr. Doherty, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty: If Five Nations is proceeding, has it identified a boat, and when will it start fishing?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I just want to back you up in terms of that. The department actually has not given a licence yet.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Then, with that, Ms. Blewett, will you ensure that the 2018 surf clam quota will be maximized for value this year?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Again—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes or no?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'm not sure that's a yes or no question.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay. Thank you.

Commissioner, during your last appearance before this committee, you were requested to table the department's report on the MV *Aiviq*, the heavy icebreaker proposed as part of project resolute. You said that you would provide it, but later you wrote that you were unable to provide it because you could not disclose it under the access to information rules.

Commissioner, I'm asking you today if you can table with this committee, by the end of this week, the letter from the ATIP commissioner that directed you not to disclose this document.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Chair—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes? No?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: As of yesterday, you have received from us a redacted report related to the MV *Aiviq*. We have done our best to comply with the spirit of the confidentiality restrictions that we believe apply, and we will await further direction from you on that report.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Commissioner, I'm asking you again if you can submit to the committee by the end of this week the letter from the ATIP commissioner that directed you to not disclose that document.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We applied the confidentiality provisions as we understand them. We didn't seek direction from the commissioner.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Commissioner, in previous testimony, Deputy Commissioner Smith outlined a schedule for receiving the first four vessels from Seaspan. Can you tell us when you expect to have the first three OFSVs in full operational capability? When do you expect to have the OOSV achieve FOC? Can you also table with the clerk the total estimated cost for each of these vessels?

● (0935)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We expect to have the first of the OFSVs—offshore fisheries science vessels—in full operation for the science season that starts summer 2019. The following two OFSV ships are expected to be in full operation for the following science season. We do not have a final price on the oceanographic vessel, as we haven't entered into a construction contract for it.

We'd be happy to provide financial information related to the OFSV project, subject to any confidentiality that we have to apply.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Commissioner, can you table with the clerk by the end of this week a full outline of funds allocated to the Canadian Coast Guard to acquire new icebreakers, which are not currently contracted under the NSS, national shipbuilding strategy, and can you advise the committee when we can expect to see the department issue its first RFP for these new-build ships? Will it be 2018, 2019, or later?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We'd be happy to provide the information that we have, subject to any confidence that may apply.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Commissioner, can you outline for the committee what vessels the Canadian Coast Guard has available to respond to an oil or chemical spill in the high Arctic if one were to occur this coming season, this coming winter? Please provide a response to the clerk in writing before the end of this week so we might review this before the summer recess.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We'd be happy to provide information, Madam Clerk, and we'd be happy to provide an outline of that answer now, if that is what's being asked for.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I would like it in writing, if possible.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We'd be happy to provide that.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Commissioner, we understand that the Canadian Coast Guard's *Terry Fox* is a converted icebreaker, and it has been a workhorse. The ship has recently run aground. Can you explain how important the *Terry Fox* is to the fleet and what your plans are to replace it, given the fact that a replacement for the ship was not contracted to Seaspan as part of the national shipbuilding program?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Thank you for the question. The *Terry Fox* is indeed an extremely important ship in our fleet as one of our two heavy icebreakers. As noted, the ship did touch ground and will be undergoing a period of dry-dock repair. It will be back in service as part of our Arctic program this summer, and we're able to cover all Arctic requirements in our program by reallocating resources internally.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hutchinson.

We received the documentation, which will be distributed after this meeting—it just came in yesterday—that you're looking for in the MV *Aiviq*. That will be distributed after this meeting. Thank you.

Mr. Finnigan, you have five minutes please.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here this morning. I'm just going to ask a question, and anyone can answer it.

As you know, in my riding of Miramichi, with the Miramichi River, there is an abundance of striped bass. It's usually a good thing. It is a good fish to eat, and it's fun to fish it. I've witnessed that myself. We had the striped bass cup last week, with over 1,000 people participating—counting everybody on the water. It was all good. The issue, however, that we're hearing from some people along the Miramichi River is around at what point it could be an overabundance of that particular species, which is native to the Miramichi.

The Miramichi is, particularly a little to the southwest, as far as we know, the spawning ground for the whole gulf. This committee was on the road last fall. We were all the way up to Cape Breton as well as Gaspé. They've never seen the amount of striped bass that we're seeing now. Sunday there was a rally. A lot of people were concerned. I attended that rally to hear their concerns and answer their questions.

One of their concerns is that we don't have, or at least they wouldn't know, what the upper reference point would be. When do we have so many that it could affect other species, particularly the Atlantic salmon, but also the shad, the smelts, some of the trouts, and other species? The striped bass is a very predatory fish. One of the questions they asked was what the upper reference point would be. Have we established that? At what point would we apply measures or expand the catch allocation?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for the question, and thanks very much for your work with the department as we continue to look into the prevalence of the species.

Sylvie would have the answer in terms of the reference levels and the impact on other species.

● (0940)

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: Thank you.

As you have noted, this is a species that's certainly very abundant right now, and it's expanding. As such, we did increase the bag limit this year and this season. We're also looking at commercial fishing opportunities for some first nations.

Having said that, we are taking quite a precautionary, progressive approach to increasing harvests of that stock. It wasn't that long ago that it was a species of concern and in quite poor condition, so we're trying to be as precautionary as possible. We're still trying to understand the dynamics of the population as well as its impacts on other species, including Atlantic salmon, as you mentioned.

There was a study we conducted with the Atlantic Salmon Federation that did find some smolts of Atlantic salmon in the stomachs of striped bass, but it ranged from about 2% to 17%. We are continuing work this summer to look at stomach contents, working with harvesters and outfitters.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

Since last year, we have implemented a river closure at a certain point, especially where the spawning occurs. This happens at a certain time of year, which is actually this week for this year. A lot of people are questioning the science behind that because a closure was never implemented when the numbers were low, and now there is a closure on the river. They are asking why we have that closure because that prohibits anyone from fishing any other species at that time.

Would you have an answer I could take back to them?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: That five-day spawning closure is based on the best available science we have. It's there to protect the spawners. Over the last few years, we have worked to make sure we get the timing just right so that we're not unduly impacting harvesting opportunities, but from a science perspective there's a strong feeling that a spawning closure is required.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

You mentioned the indigenous commercial fisheries, which I think was well received. We're all hoping that takes place.

Do you have any more information as to when that might happen and what roadblocks there are, if any, to the harvesting and sale of that good-eating, good-tasting fish?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: We're working with first nations. We hope to finalize that commercial exploratory fishery soon. We understand they have developed some markets for it.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Would you have a number as to how many they would catch?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Finnigan. I'm sorry.

Mr. Doherty, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Will you ensure that the 2018 surf clam quota will be maximized for value this year?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: One of the things we look at if I—

Mr. Todd Doherty: It really is just a yes or no question, Ms. Blewett.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Respectfully, what I would like to expand on is that we look at the science. We look at the access—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Correct.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We look at a number of pieces. In terms of value, there are a number of ways you could break that out, whether you want to push it to science, indigenous access, or commercial value. We're doing our very best to go through a new process.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay. I'm going to take that as a—

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We're going to do our best.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Commissioner, we are concerned that you're looking at the Arctic offshore ships, which are being built for the navy, to meet your operational needs, rather than building new icebreakers. Can you outline in writing for us how the Arctic offshore ships meet your operational needs? What are the limitations from a Canadian Coast Guard operational perspective?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Madam Chair, the AOPS vessel is an extremely capable vessel for Arctic patrol. It's not built to be an escort icebreaker, and it's not under consideration as an escort icebreaker. I'm happy to put that in writing, as requested.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Commissioner, can you table with the clerk by the end of this week a report on how the *Louis S. St-Laurent* heavy icebreaker was used from November 2016 to May 2017, and November 2017 to May 2018? Please also indicate the missions on which it was used to break polar class 3 ice during the last two years.

● (0945)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I don't want to over-promise on this. I don't know that we'd be able to break it down to the number of times the *Louis* had to break polar class 3 ice multi-year.... Icebreaker captains and commanding officers encounter a variety of situations in a single day, and to break that out into a number of times may simply not be possible from an operational perspective.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm going to turn my time over to Mr. Deltell.

The Chair: You have two minutes and 30 seconds, Mr. Deltell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to discuss the agreement further to the contract awarded on February 21 to the Five Nations Clam Company.

Ms. Blewett, as long as you can recall, is this the first time that a fishing contract was awarded to a company without any fishing vessels?

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you for the question. The department doesn't have information about the specifics of that at the moment. We've not received that information. The department is continuing to go through the process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: How is it, then, that the department awarded a fishing contract to a company without any fishing vessels, when it did not know whether the company had any?

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We have not actually yet given a licence to any of the...for the fourth licence. That has not occurred yet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, although the deputy minister doesn't know whether a contract was awarded, we do know that Minister LeBlanc held a big press conference on February 21, proudly proclaiming that this was a step towards reconciliation with first nations. Newfoundland and Labrador's fisheries minister, however, said it was anything but because it pitted first nations communities against one another.

That said, I will ask my question again. How is it that the department awarded a contract to a fishing company that had no fishing vessels? You're telling us that you didn't know whether it had any vessels or not. How is that possible?

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you for the question.

We went through an "expression of interest" process and we're continuing to work with the proponent that was chosen, but a licence has not yet been given, and we're working through the process—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You did not say only that the department was working on the process for awarding the contract. That said, the Ethics Commissioner is investigating the minister's decision, but that's another matter.

How could the minister approve—and announce with great fanfare on February 21—an agreement with Five Nations Clam Company, when you just told me that the licence has not been issued yet and you do not know whether the company, which will be responsible for fishing, has any fishing vessels?

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We, through the department, were able to provide the minister with options, looking at the benefits potentially coming to reallocating this fishery. We gave seven options to the minister to take a look at and to make a selection through the—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: So the minister picked out the best for his own interests—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deltell.

Thank you, Ms. Blewett.

That's your time.

We're going now to Mr. McDonald, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I first want to comment on the question from my colleague, Mr. Doherty, on the department ensuring the full value of any fishery. Many people hold quotas, whether they be an IQ, a trip limit, daily, or weekly. The department doesn't dictate whether that full quota is ever caught. That's up to the individual quota owner. They make a business decision to either fish it or not, so I don't think it's the department's role to guarantee that any quota be fully harvested for any value.

On the Arctic surf clam issue, I have one question to the department, I guess. Does the department believe the minister made the right decision on the allocation of this quota?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We looked at the proposals that came in. Again, we received nine. Two were clearly ineligible. They just did not meet the bar. The remaining were assessed against criteria: again, direct significant benefits to indigenous communities; contribution to conservation was an important consideration for us; the ability to process and market; and, looking at the feasibility of it. We gave options and we assessed each of the proposals against those criteria. Under the Fisheries Act, the ministerial authority to make that decision is exactly appropriate, so we provided that to the minister for his decision.

● (0950)

Mr. Ken McDonald: Thank you.

You mentioned earlier in some testimony that DFO science is partnering with Norway in looking at oil spill cleanup and how they do things. That kind of perked a little bit of interest for me to partner with Norway.

Have we considered doing the same thing with regard to the seal population? Norway had a problem with seals, and they resolved it. When we ask about seals here at committee, the comments we get from the department are that there's no scientific proof that the seals are detrimental to any of our fish stocks. They're eating fish. There's a study the department did a while back that says how many pounds of fish they eat every day, yet they don't damage the capelin stock, they don't damage the salmon stock, and they don't damage the northern cod stock.

Would the department look at partnering with Norway to see what they did to solve the seal problem?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for the question. We're very happy to speak with them.

One of the things we're trying to make sure we do is to bring our best possible advice on any topic. Where there are international experts or opportunities to maximize our understanding and benefit, we'll be happy to follow up.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Thank you.

We've had a number of fishermen present to the committee over the past year or so. A couple of individuals presented in our last study on vessel regulations, which we have almost completed now. Some of their testimony gave a scathing report of the local DFO in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Since they have started fishing, a couple of these individuals seem to feel like they have been targeted by DFO with regard to the number of boardings by officials to inspect what they have in their holds and what they have been catching—the size and everything else. They feel they are being discriminated against because of the testimony they gave here before the committee.

Would the department please look at that? Can you comment on whether you think doing that is good value for your resources spent?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'm really surprised. I'm sorry about that correlation.

We do fisheries enforcement, and we do think that's an important part of our mandate. However, I'd be really shocked that there would be any sort of conclusion about reprisal. I don't think that's in our makeup.

Again, it's an important part of our mandate, particularly as we look at the prospect of a new fisheries act. We need to make sure we do have people available around the country to enforce our new mandate.

Sylvie, do you have any thoughts?

The Chair: Thank you. That's the time.

We're now going to go to Mr. Donnelly for his five minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There's been a lot of discussion about Kinder Morgan lately. Has a risk assessment been done on the decision to purchase the Kinder Morgan pipeline as it relates to the impact of a diluted bitumen spill on the Pacific Ocean?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you very much for the question.

From our perspective, we look at our ability to do environmental response. We have not done a direct correlation with that. We do look at vessel traffic and any increase in vessel traffic. It's pretty interesting. We do look at, for example, the coast of British Columbia. I'm most familiar with it in the context of what we're doing for endangered species and preserving the southern resident killer whale. We look at and monitor how much vessel traffic there is. We also do that to make sure we're prepared in the context of spill response, so we would know—

● (0955)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Just on the orcas, there's a 700-fold increase proposed. That's essentially a tanker per day increase. Our scientists are telling us that any additional noise for those southern resident killer whales is going to be a problem. Has there been a study to show what that increased traffic will do to those whales?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: With respect to the killer whales, we are proactively looking at measures to reduce vessel noise and increase access to foraging areas, and looking at measures to help us ensure that vessel traffic stays out of those critical habitat areas for the southern residents.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Turning back to the sustainable aquaculture program "in support of an improved regulatory system", will funding from the sustainable aquaculture program be used to address the concerns raised in the 2018 spring report of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development entitled "Salmon Farming"? She was very critical of the department on specifics to do with salmon farming on the west coast.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: For sure, the commissioner had some serious comments about aquaculture. We're quite focused on making sure we complete the assessments on key diseases. As I mentioned, we're working with the provinces to make sure we are lined up with their priorities, and we're looking at strengthening our enforcement on aquaculture facilities and making sure we are executing our obligations.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, so the question was about funding, and I'm assuming your answer is a yes.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: It's a yes, sorry. I wanted to try to fill in every....

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, yes, and the one thing I've been hearing from the province is that they have had a lack of involvement from the federal government in salmon farming on the west coast. They feel they're under attack and they have had no support. They feel they have 10% of the jurisdiction while the feds have 90% or an increased amount of jurisdiction, and they feel they've been taking 100% of the focus of what happened since Washington banned open-net farms in its state and first nations have occupied farms in British Columbia. The feds have been absent on this file.

Is there going to be increased support coming from the federal government to work with the province in the field in this area?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: As I mentioned, I was talking to my B.C. colleague last night. I met with him a couple of weeks ago. We're really engaged with them very often, and we're trying to be supportive and make sure we are on the ground and appropriately executing our role, and supporting the province where it is looking for that. I know that the provincial and federal ministers are talking —I actually think it might be today or tomorrow. We work really collaboratively. I have strong relationships, and again, when I met face to face with my colleague a couple of weeks ago, we talked about all the ways to come to a resolution on some of the aquaculture issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blewett.

We have time for one more round of five-minute questions, so we're going to go now to Mr. Morrissey, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

My first question is to the deputy minister.

Madam Deputy Minister, the whole issue around surf clams as it relates to a vessel is irrelevant given that nobody would acquire a vessel until they had confirmation they would indeed be able to fish the quota they were given. This vessel would cost what? It would cost millions of dollars to acquire, and whoever would have access to fish would have the ability to lease or to own the vessel to pursue their quota. Am I correct?

● (1000)

Ms. Catherine Blewett: For sure, prosecuting that resource is a significant undertaking, and the capital investment required would be significant.

You know, again, I can't speak to what individual proponents may or may not do—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, I'm not interested in that, but they would have access.... They could choose to lease a vessel or acquire a vessel, could they not?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: In any proposal, however, a proponent would choose to do it, that's not—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: But common business sense would tell you that you would only execute that after you were assured of the licence.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: On the line of questioning related to "this proponent should have been deemed ineligible because it did not have a vessel", that's an irrelevant fact.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I thank you for the opportunity to reiterate and reinforce that. At the moment, the department has not issued an additional licence, so—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: So why would you get a boat? Okay.

Next, given the reality of the whales in the gulf region, which is now an issue that will have to be dealt with, how much are you dedicating to the issue of ropeless trap markers for the crab fishery? Unless technology develops in that area, they're going to continue to have to shut significant areas to fishing.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We're incredibly seized with making sure that we do the very best we can for conservation of the right whales. We think that the numbers we're seeing already do indicate a pretty significant shift: 75 is about one-sixth of the world's population of this species, unfortunately, so we're trying to do our very best.

We're very cognizant, by the way, just before I get to your question on the fixed gear and the traps, that the way in which Canada manages our response to ensuring the safety of these species will be noted internationally. It impacts our trade significantly. Through mechanisms that we have—for example, the Atlantic fish fund—we're encouraging, and in fact we're seeing, project proposals for exactly that kind of gear. I will skip over the technical terms, but they're important innovations that will allow, for instance, putting a trap into the water that can be monitored, followed, relocated by GPS, and brought to the surface without ropes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: If that were proven, it would allow this industry to continue to fish in areas that whales migrate to, would it?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Correct. That's one of the things we're working through.

Actually, at the end of last year, I had the opportunity to go to a scientific conference that was in Canada for the first time ever. Many American and I would say international cetacean experts were there. They talked about the ability for that coexistence. The scientists were working on those same prototypes to let that kind of interaction happen. They strongly encouraged governments to look at and understand that technology.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I want to go back to a question on your fishery aquaculture program.

Aquaculture is a big business in my part of the country, in Prince Edward Island, especially in the lucrative oyster aquaculture fishery and mussel aquaculture. Could you briefly explain what resources you're putting in that area to ensure that it's sustainable and environmentally sustainable?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We're working quite hard. I was going to pass this to Philippe Morel, who could tell you an awful lot about it, but in 10 seconds, absolutely, the program that we have two years' funding for is looking at making sure, honestly, that the environmental premise around operations is supported and reinforced.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blewett.

Mr. Doherty, you have five minutes, please.

● (1005)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, are you aware of the amount of money or funding from the Canadian government that has been delivered to the Elsipogtog First Nation between February and this date?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'm sorry; I'm not aware.

Mr. Todd Doherty: If you don't have the information today, could you table at your earliest convenience, preferably by the end of this week, the amount of money that the department spent prosecuting this expression of interest specifically in relation to engaging first nations in this proposal?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I will undertake to get you the information that we have.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blewett, last October the minister wrote to my colleagues, MP Arnold and MP Albas, and stated that no DFO resources would be available for aquatic invasive species prevention in British Columbia. On March 20, the minister appeared before this committee and suggested that some of the $7.2 million that was allocated for the aquatic invasive species in budget 2018 could be applied to B.C.

Has your department provided new resources for aquatic invasive species in B.C. and, if so, what are the new resources?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I will check to get you the specific breakdown. I should tell you that we're looking at support to aquatic invasive species in British Columbia and are in very active discussions with Alberta, but we'll get you the breakdown.

Kevin, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There are new funds for aquatic invasive species that were received in last year's budget, and it's in this year's main estimates as new funds. It builds on the Asian carp program that we've had for the previous five years. It expands the Asian carp program to $4 million ongoing. It enhances what we also have now on sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, an extra $2.5 million a year, and there was, for the first time ever, a national core component for aquatic invasive species, so we have a small national program that is about $3 million a year. It's a fairly small amount, but it is new, and it is allowing us to take a national perspective with respect to—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Again, how much is allocated for British Columbia?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I don't know exactly. We can get that. I don't know if it's even divided by province, but in any case, we can get you the breakdown of funding.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I believe my colleagues have asked for that a few times, so if you can do that by the end of the week, Mr. Stringer, thank you.

I'm going to go back to surf clam and part of the big criteria, because a lot of talk the last couple of months has been about a vessel. Indeed, my colleagues have mentioned why you would have a boat if you don't have a licence. Well, part of the critical bid criteria was the description of the vessel that would be used to prosecute this fishery in a time frame at which the vessel would be on licence. Did Five Nations submit that?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: As you would know, all of the documentation is quite public. I don't have it with me at the moment, because it would be in another binder.

Mr. Todd Doherty: They did, but it was a foreign vessel. It was based out of Massachusetts, and the owner of the vessel, who was photographed in the bid proposal, was not even aware that his vessel was being used in this bid. Were you aware of that?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I was not aware.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly, you have the final five minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Budget 2018 committed $21 million in funding to protect Canada's nature parks and wild spaces. Will this funding be invested in Canada's commitment to protect 10% of its oceans and coastlines by 2020?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I will turn to Philippe, who can give you more of that breakdown.

Mr. Philippe Morel: The announcement in the budget to meet the conservation target is not related to marine conservation targets, although there are some resources for national marine conservation areas under Parks Canada to be created in the Great Lakes, but they're not under DFO jurisdiction. All the money to achieve the 10% target was already approved by budget 2016 and by budget 2017, and we're confident that we have the necessary resources to meet the target by 2020.

● (1010)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That sounds like a no, and the $21 million won't be used; you already have enough money.

Mr. Philippe Morel: I'm not aware that $21 million is dedicated to DFO, and it's not for that resource, no. It's for Parks Canada.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Yes, thank you.

Going back to the OPP, will the oceans protection plan funding be divided between plan partners: DFO, Transport Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Natural Resources Canada? If that's a yes, could you break that down?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I may actually turn to Mario. He's our lead for fisheries and oceans in terms of the joint secretariat.

I could take a stab at the ballpark figures. Of the $1.5 billion, we at Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard have absolutely the lion's share of that. I would say it's in the neighbourhood of $850 million. That's the lion's share of the funding. For Transport Canada, Mario, you can kick me under the table, but I might say it's around $400 million. Environment and Climate Change has a smaller piece, and NRCan has a smaller piece again.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That would probably be $150 million each for Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Jeff's jumping in. I must have said something wrong.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I'd be happy to jump in on this. We'd be happy to provide a precise breakdown of this. The number that the deputy just quoted is actually the Coast Guard portion. The total Coast Guard-DFO portion is right around $1.1 billion, and the remainder is divided among the other departments, with the lion's share of that going to Transport Canada. We can divide that up precisely.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You're saying it's $1.1 billion for the department. Thank you.

Could you give me a quick overview of the marine mammal response plan in the event of an oil spill on the Pacific coast? This is with regard to the OPP.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Response planning is something that is ongoing. We currently have a response plan in place with the City of Vancouver that you may have heard of, the greater Vancouver integrated response plan, the GVIRP. We are evolving—if I may put it that way—our process for response planning under the OPP with the RPP—the regional response planning—and it's under that process that a full range of considerations, including marine mammal response would be included in our planning.

Right now, our response planning is very much about containing and removing pollutants from the water, but that's outstanding under the RPP. I don't have a marine mammal response plan in my hand. Through the implementation of the OPP, I will.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Could you send a response to the request for a response plan in writing to us?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I'm sorry. I am not clear on what you're asking for.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Can you send the plan once it's done in writing?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Once the regional response plan is developed, then it will be a public document.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: What's the timeline on that?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We're entering public consultations on that in the very near term. It will take some time. I would think we're —

Mr. Fin Donnelly: In the fall?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Probably later than that. I would think that this time next year might be the earliest. It's multi-party and very broad. It incorporates science, indigenous interests, provincial interests, the transition from on water to on land. It's a very comprehensive approach.

We believe the regional response planning approach is the most comprehensive approach taken for environmental response on water that we're aware of.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Hutchinson.

That concludes our rounds of questions. I would like to thank our department officials for appearing today and answering the questions. Sylvie Lapointe, Mario Pelletier, Jeffery Hutchinson, Catherine Blewett, Kevin Stringer, Jen O'Donoughue, and Philippe Morel, thank you very much for your time. We appreciate your being here.

We're going to move to the main estimates. I still have to go through the official motions on the main estimates. We'll take two seconds until our departmental officials leave the table.

We have committee business we still have to do, and we have quite a bit. I'll suspend for two minutes if you want to grab a coffee.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1015)

The Chair: We are now back in public. We will have to suspend to go in camera for the next session.

We now need to vote on the main estimates.

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....$1,518,591,959

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....$586,710,928

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....$204,444,700

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report votes 1, 5, and 10, less the amount voted in the interim estimates, under Fisheries and Oceans to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Chair: That will conclude the main estimates. I will report those back to the House.

We're now going to suspend for 10 seconds to go in camera.

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